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ABSTRACT

By creating the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) in 1988, the Colorado General Assembly responded to the needs of 4- and 5-year-old children who are at risk of educational failure in Colorado. This paper is an executive summary of a report to the state's general assembly on the project's first 6 months of progress. The CPP addresses two critical factors in reducing risk of academic failure: strong student communication skills in oral and written language and parental involvement in school activities. After authorization by the Colorado Department of Education, 33 school districts began the preschool programs in January, 1989. In this booklet, a case study reveals the impact of the program on a typical family, and descriptive materials profile the children and families served in the programs. Additionally, cooperation among personnel of various agencies is discussed, and the incidence of use of service delivery models is indicated. Benefits, needs, and recommendations for the Colorado Preschool Program are also enumerated. (RH)

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COLORADO PRESCHOOL PROJECT

Progress Report: Year 1

A Report to the Colorado General Assembly

ED330481

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PS 019560

Piton Foundation
Clayton Foundation
Colorado Department of Education

July 1989

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COLORADO PRESCHOOL PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT: YEAR 1

A Report to the Colorado General Assembly

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June 1989

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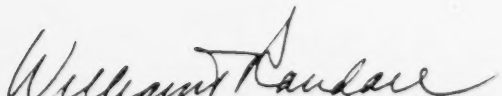
Citizens of Colorado:

It is my pleasure to present the first report on the progress of the **Colorado Preschool Project**. This project was authorized in 1988 by the Colorado General Assembly for the purpose of creating services for 2,000 four and five year olds in need of language development. With this legislation Colorado is recognizing that we have families with children in our communities who can benefit from early childhood care and education.

The **Colorado Preschool Project** reflects the rich diversity of our state. Local early childhood specialists representing Headstart, the private sector and local districts from all parts of our state responded to the challenge of developing high quality services for both child and family. The children in the program represent 27 different language groups. The programs range from serving three children in a small mountain town to over 300 in an inner city setting. Colorado can feel proud of its response to these families and children.

I would like to express my appreciation to the **Clayton Foundation** for their leadership and generous support of the teachers involved in this project. A special thank you to the **Piton Foundation** for providing valuable resources for the evaluation. Thank you to the University of **Colorado at Boulder** for collecting the information contained in this report. This public/private partnership has added significantly to the quality of the project and also expressed the depth of commitment of Colorado to its children.



William T. Randall, Commissioner of Education
State of Colorado

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report documents an important milestone in the education of young children in Colorado. It describes the development of programs for preschool children through the cooperative efforts of public education, public and private community resources, and the Colorado Legislature. This report is made possible by the support of many people and agencies.

Thanks go to the Piton Foundation for funding this effort and a subsequent evaluation which will follow. Particular recognition should go to Mary Gittings and Elaine Berman at Piton who continue in their active support to make this a success. Thanks also to Adele Phelan, President of the Clayton Foundation, for her support in carrying this project forward.

Special mention also goes to David Smith and Wayne Martin at the Colorado Department of Education, who assisted in the guidelines and design of the total evaluation plan. Commissioner of Education William Randall has also been extremely supportive in making this program review process possible.

Finally, thanks go to the INREAL Outreach Education Center, the contractor for the report, and its staff who always went the extra mile to assure high quality information. Drs. Elizabeth Heublein and Rebecca Edmiaston provided excellent leadership to this project.

Kenneth R. Seeley
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DEDICATION

This report is dedicated
to Colorado's young children,
their families,
their teachers,
and the legislators
who serve them.

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THE OPPORTUNITY

The number of students placed at risk of educational failure has been steadily increasing. Current statistics indicate that 25% of Colorado students entering high school will not finish. A review of national studies shows that early childhood education increases school success, employability, and reduces dependence on social welfare programs. For every $1.00 spent on preschool education, $4.75 can be saved in later social costs.

Two critical factors in reducing risk for academic failure are strong student communication skills in oral and written language and parental involvement in school activities.

The State of Colorado has created a unique opportunity for the future of Colorado's children.

In 1988, the Colorado General Assembly responded to the needs of four- and five-year-old children placed at risk of educational failure in Colorado by creating the Colorado Preschool Program. The program addresses language development in children and parent involvement. After authorization by the Colorado Department of Education, 33 school districts began the preschool programs in January, 1989.

To assure the development of quality early childhood programs, the Clayton Foundation and the Colorado Department of Education received funds from the Piton Foundation to survey and assess the preschool programs from January, 1989, through June, 1990.

Data were gathered by local schools and reported to the report team. Report team members visited 28 sites and conducted a group interview with the project staff and families. A group interview was also conducted with the five remaining sites through conference calls.

The purpose of the report is to describe the progress made by these programs during the first six months.

In this booklet, the progress of the 33 preschool programs is summarized. First, the impact of the program on a typical family is shown by a case study. Second, the children and families served in the programs are described. Additionally, cooperation among personnel of various agencies is discussed. Finally, benefits, needs, and recommendations are given.

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CASE STUDY: A Rose in Bloom

Anyone who has grown up as the youngest in the family remembers how it felt when they had something of their very own that an older brother or sister hadn't worn first or that wasn't a hand-me-down. Jamie was the youngest of the four children in his family and special things were rare since Jamie's mom and dad had been divorced when he was only 18 months old. Mom had worked for a while, but since her car accident she hadn't been able to stay on her job. Grandpa and Grandma lived nearby and helped out a lot, but it was still hard to make ends meet.

Jamie's older brother, Joe, was having problems in school. Even though Jamie was only four, Mom was beginning to worry about him, too. "He just isn't interested in the things we do around the house," his mom said, "or even stories we try to read him. He knocks over the things his brother is playing with and when his brother gets mad, Jamie screams or throws himself down on the floor. Either he doesn't want to, or doesn't know how to play with other kids. And he doesn't want to talk about anything. He won't even ask questions. I'm worried that he's going to have problems in school, too."

That was Jamie last fall. When Jamie's mom heard about a preschool for four-year-old children who have trouble communicating, she decided to take Jamie and to talk with the teachers.

Jamie started school in February. He liked it. Nobody else in his family had done this before; it was new. He didn't have to go with his brothers or sister; he could do it by himself. After a month or so, he began to come home saying, "Mom, want to know what I learned today?"

One day, Jamie's grandmother came to visit him at his school. Grandma remembers how excited Jamie seemed. "He took me by the hand and we looked at every toy and activity area in the room. He told me what everything was, how it worked and what he liked to play with most," said Grandma. "The blocks are my favoritest thing cause you can really build things," Jamie told his teacher as he was showing his grandmother around. Grandma was happy she'd visited and she could tell Jamie was proud of his school.

During the spring, Jamie's entire class and parents visited a zoo. Jamie's mom was surprised by how much he enjoyed it. After the field trip, all the children were asked to draw a picture of their favorite zoo animal. "I really wasn't expecting him to draw very well, but he took gray paper and drew an elephant with people riding on it. Before starting school he only made scribbles," his mother told the teacher. "I didn't know he was so creative."

Jamie's mom looked forward to talking with other parents who served with her on the advisory committee. She was always willing to help with extra projects at preschool. The materials she made were appreciated by staff and children. "It's always so much fun to be in the classroom and just watch the kids," she told the teachers. When she came to observe, she saw children busy building

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with blocks, figuring out how to include everybody when they were playing house, or looking at books and talking about the story.

Soon Jamie's mom realized she was using many of the things she had seen at school when she talked with Jamie. When she read to her children, she noticed Jamie was enjoying it more. She said, " I never really had an opportunity to be so involved with my other children when they started school; I wish I had felt as welcomed and included as I do at Jamie's school. I've especially liked attending workshops with the staff."

Grandpa noticed the change in Jamie, too. Jamie had seen Grandpa work on the house many times before, but suddenly he was interested in the whole process. Grandpa shared his tools and answered Jamie's questions. Mom says, "He wants to know all about the tools, why Grandpa is doing certain things and even what it will look like when it's finished."

Jamie's relationship with his brothers changed, too. "In less than six months he has moved from crying, whining and disagreeing with his brothers to knowing how to begin to talk to and cooperate with them."

"The way he talks is so different," his mother and teacher both said. "Before preschool he would point at something and say, 'See that thing there?' Now he is able to say, 'See that green car over there with the red stripe and big tires? I want it.'

"I used to call him 'my little headache,'" said Mom, "but now I call him 'my little rose,' because he's really blooming. And what's also nice is I feel like I'm blooming too. I'm considering going back to school myself because of the teacher's encouragement. I just can't thank those people enough."

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DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Demographic information was received on 1,750 (88%) of the 1,985 children who were served by the preschool project.

- Approximately one in four of the children live in homes where a non-English language is spoken as the primary language.
- About half of the children served were from minority families.
- One in four of the children lives in a single-parent household.
- Nearly one in four has a mother who is a high school drop-out.
- Of the adult males living in the home, one in five did not complete high school.
- More than two-thirds of the families have annual incomes less than $20,000.
- Twenty-six percent live in rural communities while 74% live in urban communities.
- Parents in rural areas had, on the average, less formal education than those in urban areas.

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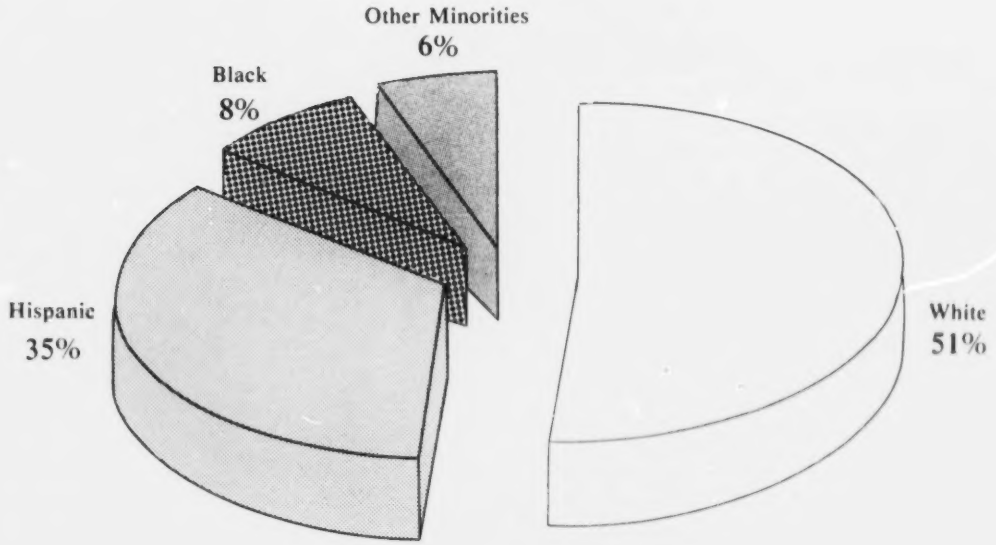
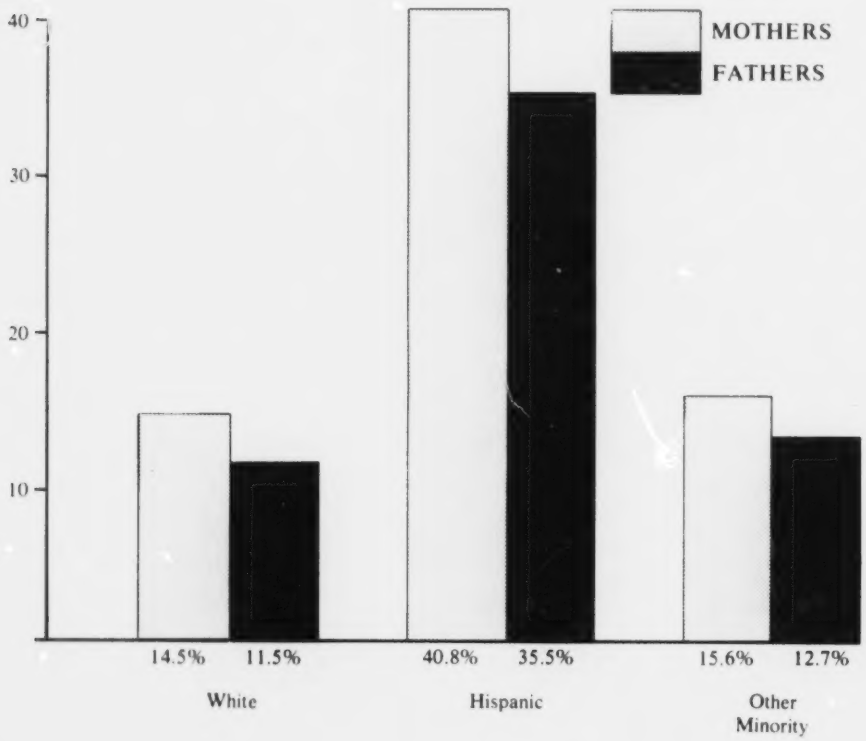
ETHNICITY OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
TOTAL SAMPLE



PERCENT OF CPP PARENTS HAVING LESS THAN
12 YEARS OF FORMAL EDUCATION
(by Ethnicity and Gender)



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COLLABORATION

Interagency collaboration is an important component of the preschool program because the participating families need a variety of services and support. Although the major thrust has been to get the preschools set up, collaborative relationships are emerging.

- Over half of the school districts were working with other agencies in providing the preschool programs.
- Over one-third of the school districts contracted with Head Start to provide the preschool programs.
- Cooperative relationships with county agencies have been established by participating districts.
- County libraries across numerous sites supported classrooms in a variety of ways.
- Local community support for the preschool program is strong.

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THE SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

Within the 33 school districts participang in the Colorado Preschool Project, 100 preschool classrooms served 1,985 children. Districts shared generously with other agencies to establish the preschool classes. Four different models of service were created by school districts, Head Start, private preschools, and other agencies. Approximately 25% of the 100 classrooms were provided by private preschools.

Service Providers		Number of Districts
MODEL A:	School District	16
MODEL B:	School District and Head Start	9
MODEL C:	School District, Head Start, and Private Preschool/ Day Care	4
MODEL D:	School District, Head Start, Private Preschool/ Day Care, and University Educational Service Unit	4

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BENEFITS OF THE PRESCHOOL PROJECT

Preschool Staffs

- Parents are supportive and enthusiastic about the preschools.
- Visits by teachers to the homes are creating positive school/home relationships.
- Children have shown gains in their communication skills and are becoming more independent learners.
- The smaller class sizes have greatly facilitated the children's progress.
- Preschool education is beginning to be accepted and supported by school districts as a part of the school district program, particularly where preschools are located in elementary schools.

Report Team

- The children/families served display the needs associated with risk of educational failure.
- State, county and local agencies are beginning to work together to provide services to children and families.
- Community awareness and support of the preschool program and its importance is increasing.
- Programs are based on nationally recognized models of quality early childhood education.
- Preschool staffs are becoming aware of the importance of working with families.
- Program staffs are working to provide quality preschools.

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NEEDS OF THE PRESCHOOL PROJECT

Preschool Staffs

- Flexible work schedules are necessary to increase the number of visits made to the children's homes.
- Parent involvement in the classrooms needs to increase.
- Ongoing staff development in the areas of child development and working with families is needed to improve staff expertise.
- More classroom materials are needed to facilitate child-directed and child-initiated learning.
- Programs need to be located in elementary schools or buildings with other preschool programs to increase opportunities for both children and staff to interact with peers.

Report Team

- Advisory councils must begin to meet with program staff on a regular basis to become a functioning component of the program.
- Guidelines regarding program eligibility need to be clarified.
- Preschool staff need to view families as equal partners who make significant contributions to the preschool program.
- Preschool teachers need to increase their understanding of how to work with families.
- Programs must provide more child-directed, child-centered learning experiences.
- Transportation issues must be reviewed and resolved.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents and Colorado Preschool Project educators applaud the efforts of the Colorado legislators in creating this project for at-risk preschool children. They would like to see this interest continued and expanded. In this vein, the following recommendations have been made:

Preschool Staff

- Maintain flexible eligibility criteria so that children with a variety of risk factors can be served.
- Integrate preschool programs so that students do not become "labeled" or stigmatized.
- Provide sufficient funding for the program to be fully implemented.
- Expand the number of programs to serve more children.

Report Team

- Establish and maintain preschool programs based on NAEYC standards.
- Maintain flexible criteria for eligibility so that a variety of risk factors can be considered, but provide clarification regarding these criteria.
- Encourage integration of programs with other early education services to children and families.
- Continue staff development training opportunities to assure well qualified early educators.
- Identify exemplary sites that can be observed by other educators and others interested in quality preschools.
- Provide sufficient funding for program to be fully implemented.
- Track the progress of students/families through school to study the meaningful effects of the program.

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